

Message Text

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ACTION PM-07

INFO OCT-01 EA-11 ADP-00 CG-00 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00

RSC-01 L-03 PA-03 USIA-12 PRS-01 ACDA-19 MC-02 RSR-01

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R 130236Z JUL 73

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1258

INFO NAVELEXSYSCOM FOR PME-119

CNO WASHDC

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

CINCPACREP CANBERRA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: MARR, PINT, AS

SUBJ: ALP FEDERAL CONFERENCE GIVES CONDITIONAL APPROVAL

TO PROJECT OMEGA: NO DIRECT REFERENCE TO OTHER

DEFENSE FACILITIES

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: AFTER LONG AND AT TIME EMOTIONAL
DEBATE JULY 12, ALP CONFERENCE GAVE CONDITIONAL APPROVAL
TO CONSTRUCTION OF OMEGA NAVIGATIONAL FACILITY,
LEAVING MATTER IN HANDS OF PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE IF RESOLUTION AS APPROVED
BY CONFERENCE IS CONSTRUED RIGOROUSLY, IT RAISES QUESTION
WHETHER STATION CAN BE BUILT WHILE ALP IS IN POWER.
HOWEVER, MAJOR OPPONENTS OF OMEGA APPEAR TO HAVE CON-
CEDED ULTIMATE DEFEAT IN THEIR OPPOSITION TO CONSTRUCTION
OF STATION. END SUMMARY.

2. IN FIVE-HOUR DEBATE ON DEFENSE AND FOREIGN POLICY
RESOLUTION AT ALP FEDERAL CONFERENCE JULY 12, CON-
FERENCE GAVE CONDITIONAL APPROVAL TO CONSTRUCTION OF
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AN AUSTRALIAN OMEGA FACILITY. THERE WAS NO DIRECT

REFERENCE TO EXISTING U.S. AND JOINT DEFENSE FACILITIES, THOUGH DEBATE MADE CLEAR EXPECTATION WITHIN ALP THAT NEGOTIATIONS WERE CONTINUING WITH THE U.S. ON THE MATTER. NATURE OF THESE NEGOTIATIONS NOT DISCUSSED, BUT CONFERENCE DISPOSED OF MATTER IN THIS WAY.

3. DEBATE OPENED WITH AN EFFORT BY PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM TO REJECT AMENDMENT TO 1971 PLATFORM ON FOREIGN BASES WHICH WOULD HAVE EXPRESSED FORMAL PARTY OPPOSITION TO OMEGA. AMENDMENT WAS PRESENTED BY SOCIALIST LEFT DELEGATE FROM VICTORIA, IAN CATHIE. WHITLAM MOTION WAS DEFEATED, 23 59 25, THOUGH THERE WERE INDICATIONS THAT DELEGATES WERE CONSUED AS TO PRECISE MEANING OF WHITLAM EFFORT. AMENDMENT TO OPPOSE OMEGA OUTRIGHT WAS DEFEATED, 27 TO 18. COMPROMISE AMENDMENT (TEXT BELOW) WAS

APPROVED , 29 TO 19 AND THUS BECOMES ALP POLICY.

4. ALP 1971 PLATFORM ON FOREIGN BASES HAD STATED:
QTE LABOR IS OPPOSED TO THE EXISTENCE OF FOREIGN -OWNED, CONTROLLED OR OPERATED BASES AND FACILITIES IN AUSTRALIAN TERRITORY, ESPECIALLY IF SUCH BASES INVOLVE A DEROGATION FROM AUSTRALIAN SOVEREIGNTY, END QTE. COMPROMISE OMEGA MOTION WHICH WAS APPROVED BY CONFERENCE JULY 12 READS:
QTE CONFERENCE NOTES THAT THE PARLIAMENTARY FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE COMMITTEE IS INQUIRING INTO THE QUESTION OF OMEGA SYSTEM AND RESOLVES THAT UNLESS THE PARTY CAN BE FULLY ASSURED THAT THIS SYSTEM CANNOT BE USED FOR HOSTILE ACTS WITHOUT AUSTRALIA'S CONSENT, ITS ESTABLISHMENT IS OPPOSED. END QTE.

THERE WAS STRONG OPPOSITION EXPRESSED TO COMPROMISE MOTION, THOUGH IT WAS EVENTUALLY ADOPTED. MINISTER FOR URBAN AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT, TOM UREN, VOTED AGAINST COMPROMISE MOTION. SENATOR JOHN WHEELDON (WESTERN AUSTRALIA), WHO IS CHAIRMAN OF PARLIAMENTARY FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE COMMITTEE WHICH IS TO EXAMINE OMEGA BEGINNING IN AUGUST, STRONGLY DENOUNCED COMPROMISE MOTION. HE SAID IT HAD BEEN INAPPROPRIATE FOR OMEGA ISSUE TO BE REFERRED TO HIS COMMITTEE, ADDED THAT ALP LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DID NOT HAVE A PARTY POSITION ON OMEGA AND CONCLUDED ALP WOULD END UP BEING BOUND BY DECISION OF COMMITTEE, WHICH INCLUDES 10 OPPOSITION MEMBERS OUT OF 22. INTERVIEWED ON TV AFTER VOTE, WILLIAM HARTLEY , CHAIRMAN OF SOCIALIST LEFT OF ALP AND STRONGLY ANTI-AMERICAN AND ANTI-OMEGA, SAID HE THOUGH OMEGA WOULD CONTINUE ACTIVELY TO OPPOSE CONSTRUCTION OF AUSTRALIAN STATION.

6. AUSTRALIAN PRESS HAS TREATED CONFERENCE ACTION ON OMEGA IN SEVERAL WAYS. SOME HAVE CONCLUDED ACTION IS VICTORY FOR WHITLAM, WHILE OTHERS HAVE TERMED COMPROMISE RESOLUTION QUALIFIED ACCEPTANCE AND STILL OTHERS HAVE QUESTIONED WHETHER STATION WILL EVER BE BUILT IN AUSTRALIA.

7. COMMENT: COMPROMISE RESOLUTION ITSELF, DRAFTED BY SENATOR BISHOP (MINISTER FOR REPATRIATION), IS CURIOUS PRODUCT. CONSTRUED RIGOROUSLY (AS OMEGA OPPONENTS WILL SEEK TO DO), IT RAISES QUESTION OF WHETHER OMEGA STATION CAN BE BUILT, AT LEAST WHILE ALP IS IN POWER. THERE WOULD APPEAR TO BE NO WAY TO ENSURE THAT SYSTEM AS A WHOLE CANNOT BE USED BY SOMEONE, SOMEWHERE IN THE WORLD, FOR HOSTILE ACTS WITHOUT AUSTRALIA'S CONSENT, ANY MORE THAN SUCH ASSURANCE COULD BE OBTAINED FOR ANY OTHER NAVIGATIONAL SYSTEM. IT RAISES QUESTION OF HOW AND WHETHER OMEGA NAVIGATION SIGNALS COULD BE USED TO PERFORM "HOSTILE ACT". SEEN IN CONTEXT OF DEFMIN BARNARD'S PARLIAMENTARY STATEMENT ON MILITARY FACILITIES OF FEBRUARY 28, IT AGAIN EXPRESSES CONCERN FOR AUSTRALIAN SOVEREIGNTY AND CONTROL OF STATIONS WITHIN THE COUNTRY. IT LIKewise CONTINUES TO LUMP OMEGA WITH U.S. AND JOINT FACILITIES, A CONFUSION WHICH COULD BE CLARIFIED IN THE PROSPECTIVE HEARINGS OF THE JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE. BITTEREST OPPONENTS OF OMEGA, WILLIAM HARTLEY AND SENATOR WHEELDON, SEEM TO BELIEVE THAT THEY HAVE LOST THE FIGHT AGAINST OMEGA AND TO ASSUME THAT STATION WILL BE CONSTRUCTED. MUCH WILL DEPEND ON HOW GOA APPROACHES MATTER. MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT JONES, WHO WILL BE CHARGED ULTIMATELY WITH OPERATION OF AN AUSTRALIAN STATION, SUPPORTED OMEGA STRONGLY AND NOTED THAT AUSTRALIAN STATION WOULD BE FULLY AUSTRALIAN, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MANNED, CONTROLLED AND OPERATED. PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM AND MINISTER FOR DEFENSE BARNARD ALSO SUPPORTED OMEGA AS NAVIGATIONAL SYSTEM OF BENEFIT TO AUSTRALIA.

8. WHITLAM'S DEFEAT ON MOTION TO DISCHARGE (I.E., REJECT) AMENDMENT REQUIRING PROHIBITION OF OMEGA SYSTEM WAS HIS FIRST DEFEAT AT ALP CONFERENCE. CIRCUMSTANCES INDICATE THAT HE HAD NOT GOTTEN HIS SUPPORTERS LINED UP AND THAT SOME DELEGATES WERE CONFOUSED AS TO HIS INTENTIONS. THIS HAS HAPPENED TO WHITLAM ON NUMBER OF OCCASIONS AT ALP MEETINGS ON VARIETY OF ISSUES AND APPEARS TO REFLECT WHITLAM'S PENCHANT FOR PRESSING ON WITHOUT CAREFUL PREPARATION, CONFIDENT IN HIS VERY CONSIDERABLE ORATORICAL SKILLS. TACTIC HAS OFTEN WORKED, BUT IT SOMETIMES FAILS, AS IT DID ON THIS

OCCASION.

9. COMMENTS ON WHITLAM SPEECH ON FOREIGN POLICY AND
PROPOSED AUSTRALIAN RECOGNITION OF PRG
(WHICH WAS DEFEATED) IN SEPTEL.
GREEN

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